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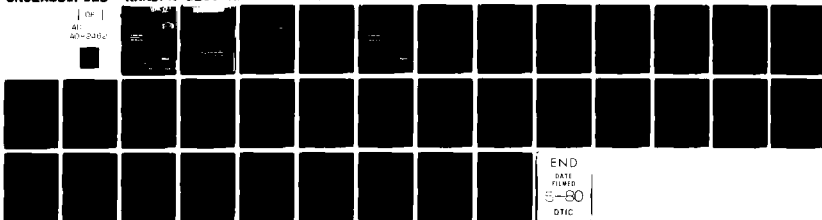
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Strategic warning may be viewed as contingently predicting an imminent, significant escalation of a confrontation. Warning of an imminent Soviet strategic nuclear attack is one of a large set of possible escalations, although of unique consequence. Confrontations and conflict may be characterized as a series of escalations and de-escalations by one or both sides, involving some six factors that cover the participants, the locale, the degree of superpower involvements, the superpower declaratory policies, the types of weapons in use, and the targets of the military violence. By locating these variables on each of these ladders at every juncture in a confrontation, the warning analyst can identify the various steps open to the enemy. To assist him in deciding which possibilities warrant his close attention, he must make some basic assumptions about enemy decisionmaking determinants. The making of such assumptions is inevitable; they should be explicit.

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N-1269-AF

January 1980

ESCALATION SPACE AND ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT ENEMY MOTIVATIONS:  
ELEMENTS IN WARNING ASSESSMENTS

William M. Jones

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**A Rand Note**  
prepared for the  
**United States Air Force**

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**Rand**  
SANTA MONICA, CA 90406

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PREFACE

The way an analyst examines a developing situation can significantly influence the kinds of patterns he is likely to detect and the contingent future course of events he might project. If analysts view strategic warning as equivalent to the a priori detection and assessment of the likelihood of an imminent major strategic nuclear attack, the process should include the collection and assessment of indications relevant to such a contingency; and the product will probably be either a conditional affirmative or a conditional negative. If the strategic warning problem is seen as the detection and assessment of a significant hostile escalation (and a major strategic nuclear attack is only one of a number of possibilities) the process becomes one of collecting and assessing indications of which one of a number of possible escalatory steps might be imminent.

This note describes and demonstrates a system for categorizing confrontation and conflict situations between the United States and the USSR. The procedure involves describing a situation in terms of its current location on a set of escalation ladders, making the categories of possible future hostile escalation apparent and open for assessment.

The work described here is a contribution to the Project AIR FORCE study of "The Role of Strategic Warning in Conflict Management."

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SUMMARY

Strategic warning can be defined as the detection and assessment, in sufficient time to permit precautionary actions, of evidence of an enemy's contingent decision to make a major military escalation of an existing confrontation or conflict. At any one point in time during a confrontation or conflict, the prior actions of the opposing parties can be viewed as having brought them to a discrete point in an escalatory process. From that point either or both of the opposing sides will have available to them further escalatory steps. This range of possible further steps can be thought of as the remaining escalation space and warning assessment becomes the problem of projecting the next move into that an actor seems likely to take. Categorizing an existing situation in terms of its location in escalation space involves the use of a more complex concept than a simple escalation ladder. There are at least six such ladders; any one situation may be identified as being at one point on each of them. The six ladders used here are:

1. The parties involved in the conflict, which can range from conflicts between neutrals (as far as the two superpowers are concerned) through some combination of conflict between the friends and allies of the two, to conflict between the military forces of the United States and the USSR;
2. The location of the conflict, which can range from the territories of neutrals to the two superpowers;
3. The degree of superpower involvement, which can range from no involvement at all, through arms supply, to the commitment of combat military forces;
4. The superpowers' declaratory policies, which can range from no comment or threat to a public announcement of the action being taken;
5. The types of weapons being used in the conflict, which can range from conventional to nuclear; and
6. The current targeting and constraints policies, which can range from attacks on unarmed systems, through counter military attacks with avoidance of civilians, to major attacks on civilian population.

Although these ladders are depicted in terms of the involvements and operations of the two superpowers (because the detection of an imminent nuclear attack by the USSR on the United States would be a critically important strategic warning problem), independent actions by one or more of their allies or friends can significantly escalate the tension between the two. Either of the superpowers in a conflict can alter the situation by escalating and thus constrain the significant escalating space available to the other. An escalating conflict situation such as the 1973 Middle East War can be described as a series of escalatory steps over time from the attack by the Egyptians and Syrians (Soviet "friends") on Israeli forces (a U.S. "friend") in Syrian and Egyptian territories (outside the pre-1967 lines; i.e., in the territories of Soviet "friends"), with the final escalation being the Soviet threat to deploy its military forces to defend its threatened "friends." By so depicting that conflict as a series of escalations, one can--at each juncture--display for evaluation the escalatory options that remain.

In evaluating the evidence of a possible enemy escalation, whether this is viewed as being a process of conditional prediction from a range of possibilities or as a conditional prediction of an imminent Soviet nuclear attack on the United States, the warning analyst is operating on a set of assumptions about Soviet leadership intentions and motivations. In the simple case of warning of nuclear attack, such assumptions might be as simple as "If they think they can win, they will be uninhibited in their attack decision."

In the case of the escalation warning problem, the analyst is presented with the question, "Which escalation?" and therefore must be guided by assumptions about Soviet decisionmaking in a range of possible situations. A Soviet initiation of a strategic nuclear attack on the United States at the time of the initial Arab attack on Israel in 1973 was clearly within their capabilities but--one might suspect--did not attract and hold the attention of the warning analysts. An example of such a set of assumptions that can concentrate the escalation warning analysts' attention on the more probable Soviet escalations might be:

1. The Soviet leaders, in their foreign affairs initiatives, persistently attempt to acquire and maintain leverage to limit and direct the initiations of other nations;

2. They view their (uncommitted but committable) military forces' capability as an instrument for such leverage;

3. They are fully aware of the uncertainties inherent in combat force control and will commit their forces only if the perceived opportunities or threats override their concerns;

4. A pattern of failures and losses of significant foreign influence might represent such a threat.

This set of assumptions about Soviet leadership commitment criteria is compatible with their past behavior in Africa and the Middle East and can be used to project their escalatory behavioral propensities in even more extreme conflict areas.



CONTENTS

PREFACE .....	iii
SUMMARY .....	v
Section	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
II. ESCALATION AND ESCALATION SPACE: A STRUCTURE FOR CHARACTERIZING CONFRONTATIONS AND CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE USSR .....	4
III. AN EXEMPLARY APPLICATION OF SITUATION/ESCALATION SPACE ASSESSMENT TO THE WARNING PROBLEM .....	15
APPENDIX .....	19

## I. INTRODUCTION

Strategic warning, as Strauch has pointed out, defies precise and comprehensive definition.<sup>1</sup> It can be a problem, a process, a product, or a producer of precautionary action. As a problem, it poses the question, "Warning of what hostile action?" As a process, it implies the collecting and evaluating of evidence that a significant hostile action is imminent. As a product, it refers to the timely report of the analysts involved in the process. And as a producer of precautionary action, it entails the implication that there has been no strategic warning if available precautionary actions have not been taken and the hostile action occurs.

Additional elements that complicate attempts at definition are the ill-defined separation between enemy capabilities and intentions, the question of the meaning of the term "imminent" and the inherent reversibility of an enemy's contingent commitment decisions. Strategic warning may be the detection of a previously undetected enemy capability or the detection of an action (or pattern of actions) that signals an enemy's intention to take a hostile action. In fact, the detection of a developing capability can, in combination with other evidence, be taken as an indication of intention. But this brings up the question of imminence. At one extreme, evidence of Soviet research and development on a new and improved nuclear delivery system could lead to warnings of a serious capability development in future years. At the other extreme, the deployment of major force elements into positions from which they can launch a devastating attack is, in a sense, a change in enemy capabilities and one that might signal an intention to attack in the very near future. The former is not usually thought of as strategic warning. The latter is. But the exploration of possibilities between these extremes brings one into a troublesome grey area as far as definitions are concerned. Finally, the issue of the reversibility of an enemy's contingent decision to commit his forces

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<sup>1</sup>See Ralph Strauch, "Strategic Warning and General War: A Look at the Conceptual Issues," N-1180-AF, June 1979.

to a significant action implies an assumption that one important purpose of precautionary reactions to strategic warning would be to cause him to reverse his commitment decision, to present him with the contingency that would cause him to so react. In effect, precautionary actions based on strategic warning are intended to influence enemy intentions and to ameliorate the effects of the predicted attack if deterrence fails.

For present purposes, strategic warning will be defined as the detection and assessments, in sufficient time to permit precautionary actions, of evidence of an enemy's contingent decision to make a major military escalation of an existing confrontation or conflict. Because a Soviet decision to initiate a major military campaign would represent the most critical and damaging threat of escalation, the emphasis is on those escalatory steps that might be the result of Kremlin decisions, but these possibilities are recognized as being at the extreme limits of their escalatory opportunities in many possible situations of international confrontation or conflict. In any particular situation (except a general nuclear war between the United States and the USSR) other nation actors have some degree of freedom to escalate a situation and thereby significantly change the strategic warning calculations of the major antagonists. Thus, the collecting and evaluating of evidence of such upcoming third party escalations becomes a part of the strategic warning problem, and the current and predicted new situations become factors in the warning analysts' predictions of possible Soviet reactions. In effect, the definition of strategic warning adopted here treats warning as a product of analyses of changes in the situations being faced, analyses of the escalatory options open to the USSR at each juncture, and an evaluation of the available evidence that might indicate which--if any--escalatory option they are preparing to take. This approach views the warning analyst as, of necessity, attributing a specific set of fundamental motivations to the Soviet leadership that interact with the situation at hand or the predicted future situation to produce Soviet intentions. His

assessment of available evidence is thus inevitably influenced by such assumptions of enemy intentions.<sup>1</sup>

In the section that follows, a scheme for characterizing international conflict situations is developed and illustrated. It is a characterizing scheme that depicts the range of international conflict possibilities from Soviet-supported low-level conflict in the Third World to general nuclear war. It thus permits the identification of any particular conflict at any particular juncture as being at a certain point in the continuum and so allows the convenient examination of the escalatory options then available to the Soviet Union.

In many low or intermediate levels of conflict, a large number of escalatory options may be open to the USSR. The warning analyst, however, must limit the number he uses to evaluate the evidence then at hand by making assumptions about Soviet leadership intentions. His assumptions are likely to be based on a combination of extrapolations from past experiences and an understandable concern to avoid underestimation of enemy malevolence. Section II develops and demonstrates a set of assumptions about basic Soviet leadership motivations that meet these two analytic criteria.

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<sup>1</sup>The normal view of the strategic warning of a Soviet general nuclear war initiation either explicitly or implicitly discounts any critical assessments of enemy intentions. In fact, however, the notion that such strategic warning is of sufficient importance to justify efforts to get it carries with it the assumption that, under some unspecified set of possible future conditions, such enemy intentions could develop.

II. ESCALATION AND ESCALATION SPACE: A STRUCTURE FOR  
CHARACTERIZING CONFRONTATIONS AND CONFLICTS BETWEEN  
THE UNITED STATES AND THE USSR

Escalation is frequently thought of as a kind of vertical "ladder" up whose "rungs" one or the other superpower may climb, skipping rungs as they see fit--a ladder whose bottom rung is labeled "peace" and whose top rung is labeled "general nuclear war." But a cursory review of past crises and conflicts--and even of the current situation--suggests that there are a number of distinctly different ways that one or the other superpower can escalate from any particular situation short of the ultimate, general nuclear war. It also suggests that there are actions that can be taken by other nations, perhaps without the approval of their supporting superpower, producing the same escalatory effects.

A nation in friendly relations with and to some extent supported by one superpower might become involved in a confrontation or conflict with a nation friendly with and supported by the other. Either or both of the superpowers can escalate the situation by altering the nature of its support in a serious way. The U.S. commitment of combat forces in support of South Korea, in the face of the Soviet-supported North Korean attack in 1950, was a significant escalation of the situation between the United States and the USSR and was clearly recognized as being so.<sup>1</sup> The degree of superpower involvement in a conflict situation is another parallel "ladder." In the October 1973 Middle East War, the United States and the USSR initially confined themselves to providing urgently needed weapons and equipment to Israel and the Arabs. Had either committed their own combat forces to the conflict, it would have been a most significant escalation. The area in which this war occurred was confined to Israel and the Arab nations

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<sup>1</sup>The initial escalation was the North Korean attack on South Korean, an attack presumably approved of or at least tolerated by the USSR. This initial escalation created the situation that the United States further escalated.

adjoining it (and the air and local waters). Had the arena of combat spread to the territories of other Arab nations (an Israeli air attack on Libya, for example), it would have been viewed as an escalation.

Still another way one or both superpowers can escalate a situation is by their declaratory policies. To take an action that clearly commits a nation to one side in an international confrontation and simultaneously announcing publicly that it is taking the action would make subsequent withdrawal a politically damaging step. Of course, if the military commitment is obvious to all, the move itself is tantamount to a public declaratory commitment. It follows that if the military commitment made is not obvious to all and the move is verbally announced only to the opponent superpower (or its allies or friends in the situation), the escalation is not quite so significant. Presumably, a private, government-to-government declaration of commitment might be kept private by the recipients and subsequent withdrawal would be less politically damaging. And no verbal commitment at all is even less escalatory.

The same rank ordering in escalatory levels applies to conditional threats. A public threat to intervene militarily in a confrontation or crisis or to escalate the combat is more committing to the threatener than a private conditional threat (as in the Brezhnev threat to commit Soviet forces to the defense of Egypt and Syria, if necessary, at the end of the 1973 war). And no verbal threat at all is even less escalatory. But an obvious preparation of military forces to ready them for commitment (such as a show of force deployment to a crisis or conflict area) is an escalatory step--a big step if accompanied by a verbal threat, a smaller step if not.

Finally, there are two additional (closely related) "ladders." One is the kinds of weapons being committed by the superpower or its ally or friend and the style of commitment. The other is the nature of the target, the recipients of the military violence. In general, the initial commitment of nuclear weapons to a conflict would be viewed as more escalatory than the commitment of chemical, biological, or radiation weapons, which, in turn, would be more escalatory than conventional weapons and forces. And a limited commitment of any of these

would be less escalatory than a commitment obviously meant to destroy all of an enemy's targets of the type selected.<sup>1</sup>

The target "ladder" is generally keyed to the notion that the constraints enforced on the use of military combat forces are significant in the escalatory sense. Attacks designed to destroy an enemy's military forces (or a particular element of those forces) while carefully avoiding infliction of civilian casualties and damage to civilian facilities is less escalatory than attacks on military forces without such constraints. And an attack targeted on civilians per se is the top of this "ladder."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in the scheme of escalation categorization, there are six ladders. Any international controversy at any juncture in its history can be characterized as being on one rung on each ladder. The remaining rungs, in various combinations, thus represent the escalation space available to the actors.

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<sup>1</sup>Limited commitment here implies a military move that is situation related. Although it may be designed to be quite effective in the local area and for the time being, it does not make it impossible for the recipient to deploy and commit more forces and continue--or even escalate--the conflict. In effect, a limited commitment (nuclear, CBR, or conventional) is a demonstrated threat of further action or escalation if the enemy should choose to continue. Thus, a limited commitment, which transfers the decision to terminate or continue (or escalate) to the enemy, is less escalatory than a strike or commitment designed to deny him this option.

<sup>2</sup>The civilian avoidance issue is usually associated with nuclear weapons use, but it applies equally to conventional weapons and force commitments. Guerilla war, with its frequent attacks on noncombatants, is typically a source of international distress. The commitment of conventional forces against noncombatants (as in the My Lai massacre) is another example. In general, using military forces to inflict casualties on an enemy's military forces is (perhaps illogically) viewed as more acceptable (and therefore less escalatory) than inflicting casualties on enemy noncombatants.

The parties involved ladder can be depicted as follows:

(Ladder A)		
<u>US side</u>		<u>SU side</u>
<input type="checkbox"/>	US / SU	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Multiple allies <sup>a</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ally <sup>a</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Multiple "friends" <sup>b</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	"Friend" <sup>b</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Multiple neutrals <sup>c</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Neutral <sup>c</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Intrastate factions <sup>d</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/>

<sup>a</sup> A superpower's "ally," in this scheme, is a nation that, at the moment, is receiving the military combat support of that superpower.

<sup>b</sup> A superpower's "friend" is a nation involved in a controversy that is receiving (at the time) the approbation and support (but not combat support) of that superpower.

<sup>c</sup> A neutral is a nation that is, at the moment, receiving neither approbation nor support from the superpower.

<sup>d</sup> Used to cover such conflict as Angola 1978, etc.

The locale of the controversy (Ladder B) can be depicted as follows:

<u>US side</u>		<u>SU side</u>
<input type="checkbox"/>	US / SU	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Space <sup>a</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sea <sup>b</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Multiple allies	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ally	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Multiple points	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Friend	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Multiple neutrals	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Neutral	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/>

<sup>a</sup> Applicable only to U.S. and Soviet space systems and activities.

<sup>b</sup> Applicable only to U.S. and Soviet naval systems and activities in international waters.



The degree of superpower involvement in the controversy (Ladder C) can be depicted as follows:

<u>US side</u>		<u>SU side</u>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Offensive and defensive forces committed <sup>a</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Defensive forces only committed <sup>a</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Providing combat advisors <sup>b</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Providing arms (gift) <sup>b</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Providing arms (sales) <sup>b</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Uninvolved militarily	<input type="checkbox"/>

<sup>a</sup>Providing superpower combat military support to a nation in combat automatically makes that nation an ally of the providing superpower.

<sup>b</sup>Providing noncombat military support to a nation in combat automatically makes that nation a friend of the providing superpower.

The superpower declaratory policy (Ladder D) can be depicted as follows:

<u>US side</u>		<u>SU side</u>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public announcement of action	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Private announcement of action <sup>a</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public verbal threat of action	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Private verbal threat of action <sup>a</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tacit threat <sup>b</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	No verbal or tacit threat	<input type="checkbox"/>

<sup>a</sup>Private here means government-to-government.

<sup>b</sup>Tacit threat is used here to cover deliberately visible force deployments or preparations.

The types of weapons or forces involved in the combat (Ladder E) can be shown as follows:

<u>US side</u>		<u>SU side</u>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Unlimited nuclear weapons use	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Limited nuclear weapons use	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Unlimited use of CBR	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Limited use of CBR	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Unlimited use of conventional weapons	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Limited use of conventional weapons	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	No weapons being used <sup>a</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<sup>a</sup>If the situation is a confrontation that has not yet progressed to combat.

The combat targeting and operational constraints (Ladder F) can be shown as follows:

<u>US side</u>		<u>SU side</u>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Deliberate attacks on civilians	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Antimilitary attack with no civilian avoidance	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Antimilitary with civilian avoidance	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Antimilitary equipment (permanent) <sup>a</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Antimilitary equipment (temporary) <sup>b</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/>

<sup>a</sup>For example, destructive attacks on such unmanned systems as sea-based surveillance nets, space surveillance, and important communications satellites, etc.

<sup>b</sup>Temporary jamming or interference.

To make these multiple ladders conveniently usable, they are incorporated into one worksheet Fig. 1.

**Fig. 1--Situation/escalation space worksheet**

The sequence of significant events in the Middle East War of 1973 can be used to illustrate the use of this worksheet format to describe the developing situation and to illustrate the uncertainties that the analyst must face, the judgments he must make, and the issues and recurrent escalatory possibilities he must assess.

The pre-attack situation can be characterized in two alternative ways. Israel, a U.S. friend, was involved in a protracted (since 1967) confrontation with the Arab states (Soviet friends). The location of the threatened conflict--if it came about--was uncertain. From one point of view, an attack by Egypt across the Suez Canal and by Syria into the Golan Heights would be attacks into the territory of Israel, based on the idea that Israeli occupation of these territories since 1967 gave them a de facto claim. Assuming that the Israeli response would be confined to the areas of the attack, if it came, the location of the threatened conflict would be in and over the territories of Israel and Egypt and Syria (as in Fig. A.1).<sup>1</sup>

But if one reverses the assumption and concedes the de jure rights of Egypt to the Sinai and Syria to the Golan Heights, the location of the threatened conflict was in Egyptian and Syrian territory (as in Fig. A.2);<sup>2</sup> and only if they chose to include targets for their initial attack within Israel itself (inside the pre-1967 lines) would the territory of a U.S. friend be involved.

But the United States and the USSR were involved to the extent of providing arms to their friends. Actually, the USSR had been providing Soviet military combat advisors/trainers to the Arabs but reportedly these were withdrawn from their assigned units before the Arab attack.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The series of situation characterizations (vignettes) that combine to describe the pattern of escalatory steps that occurred are relegated to the appendix to avoid distracting the reader.

<sup>2</sup>The situation/strategic warning analyst is well advised to attempt to view the situation as it probably is viewed by the enemy. For the remainder of this essay, this "enemy" point of view will be adopted and used.

<sup>3</sup>The degree of Soviet involvement with the Arab cause before the initial attack is a "judgment call" for the analyst. The Soviet arms transfers to Egypt and Syria were sales (and so indicated here). The terms of the sales (which have never been reported in the open literature) might have been so favorable to the Arabs as to be tantamount to

Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union made any public or private announcements or threats before the attack.

The weapons whose use was threatened in the conflict were unlimited/conventional on both sides and presumably the targeting/constraints policies of both would be anti-military with no particular attempts to avoid civilian casualties if they found themselves in the combat area.

The first escalation of the situation was the Egyptian and Syrian attacks (characterized in Fig. A.3). This unpredicted attack has been generally assessed as a serious warning (if not strategic warning) failure. It is rarely noted, however, that the second enemy escalation was correctly assessed and predicted. This second escalation was the continuation of the Syrian attack through the Golan Heights and into Israel proper (across the pre-1967 line). (See Fig. A.4.) It clearly signalled that the Arab objective was more than the simple recovery of the territory they had lost in 1967.<sup>1</sup>

The last enemy escalation of the October 1973 war was the Brezhnev conditional threat (and military preparation) to commit Soviet military forces to the defense of Cairo and Damascus (and the saving of the trapped Egyptian Third Army). (See Fig. A.5.) The threat was conditional in the sense that--presumably--it was to be carried out only if the Israelis continued their assault. This escalation, as characterized, brings up two related issues of importance to the warning analyst. The publicly available records do not reveal whether

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Soviet gifts. This is not as minor a point as it might seem. A Soviet gift of arms implies a considerably stronger commitment to their cause than a sale. Every indicator of Soviet commitment is an important factor for the strategic warning analyst to consider as he assesses the likely Soviet moves in such a situation.

By the end of the conflict both the United States and the USSR were "giving" arms to their friends.

<sup>1</sup>The Syrians may well have made the decision to take this escalatory step with no prior Soviet approval. Even so, it was a distinct escalation of the tension between the United States and the Soviet Union in that it signalled that the combat objective of the Soviet friend was the complete defeat of the American friend (as opposed to the limited objectives of regaining control of the Syrian territory lost in 1967).

the Soviet military preparations were detected and assessed before the Brezhnev communication. It is unclear whether the Soviets intended their preparations to be observed as a way of emphasizing the reality of the conditional threat.

Although a failure of the warning analyst to predict the Brezhnev threat-communication could hardly be called a warning failure, a detailed knowledge of the contents of the Brezhnev message was or would have been of great value in the warning analyst's assessment of the indicators of Soviet military preparations. Without knowledge of the contents of the message, the analyst could only guess at the future moves of the Soviet forces being readied. The (publicly) available records do not shed any light on this issue. The U.S. counteraction to the Brezhnev threat (and the Soviet military preparations to intervene in the Middle East) is subject to widely varying interpretations. The President responded with a message to Brezhnev and placed U.S. military forces--worldwide--on a high degree of alert (Defense Condition 3). The U.S. military alert was intended as either a tacit counter threat (which is unlikely, given the character of Defense Condition 3 actions) or as a response to a vaguely perceived future threat of a Soviet-initiated attack on U.S. military forces worldwide. The analyst of this bit of history, not having access to the President's communication to Brezhnev, is at a loss to evaluate these U.S. actions in escalatory terms. One can guess that the strategic warning analyst of that period also did not have access to the President's message and was therefore unassisted in his evaluation of strategic warning indicators (if any).

Figure A.6 characterizes the situation as it is assumed to have been contingently foreseen by the U.S. leaders at the time, involving conventional combat in the Middle East between U.S. and Soviet military forces (contingent on the Soviets' committing combat forces there as threatened and a U.S. counter commitment) and one that--in effect--had the United States reacting defensively to a tacit Soviet threat of further escalation to strategic nuclear weapons use.<sup>1</sup> As farfetched

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<sup>1</sup>"Tacit" because such an initiation is always within the Soviet capabilities.

as this assessment may seem in retrospect, it does point up the fact that if and when the military forces of the United States and the USSR become involved in a serious conventional conflict, the escalation space remaining for both becomes considerably restricted, and the strategic warning analyst concentrates attention on the few remaining options.

III. AN EXEMPLARY APPLICATION OF SITUATION/ESCALATION  
SPACE ASSESSMENT TO THE WARNING PROBLEM

The preceding section illustrated the scheme for characterizing situations entailing confrontation and conflicts between the United States (or its allies and friends) and the USSR (and its allies or friends) in a way that exposes the various significant escalatory steps available at each juncture. The demonstrated application used an example from history, the 1973 Middle East War. The strategic warning analyst, however, must deal with contingent futures. At each juncture in situations of international controversy and conflict (which, unhappily, seems to cover most periods), he must assess the situation in terms of possible or likely *future* escalatory steps that might be taken by the other side and collect and assess evidence in terms of what escalatory step--if any--is imminent. In effect, the warning analyst formulates a scenario or scenarios of a possible *future* enemy escalation (or of several possible escalations) and assembles and evaluates the evidence to arrive at an assessment of which contingent scenario--if any--appears to be coming true.

At the lower levels of the spectrum of conflict (for example, a Soviet friend in combat with a U.S. friend), the alternative escalation steps available to the USSR (and the USSR side) are numerous; and the warning analyst's task is, therefore, diverse and complex as he decides which contingent scenarios warrant serious attention. In the context of a high level conflict (a Warsaw Pact/NATO war) the available escalation options would be sharply truncated and the analyst's contingent scenarios sharply focused. But this is an obvious case, and the analyst must concern himself with scenarios of possible major Soviet escalations, even the ultimate escalation to general nuclear war initiation, from much less violent confrontations and conflicts.

The requirement here is to assess the low-level or even non-combat situation in terms of how the Soviet leaders might view it and its recent history. The Soviet leaders may well, in such situations, decide to take a major escalatory step, even to the initiation



of a general nuclear war on the United States, but they would have to have powerful motivations to do so. It would have to appear to them as both necessary and the only action option available. This is not to say that their decision situation would be obvious. Knowing full well the advantages of surprise preemption, they could be expected to do everything possible to mask and disguise their decisionmaking and resultant decision.

The task of the warning analyst is to read through any such masking and deception, to search for a contingent scenario of possible Soviet motivations to a major escalation that is sufficiently plausible to alert and guide the strategic warning process. Soviet "intentions" may not be an important issue to the warning analyst in his collection and assessment efforts, but the credibility of his assessments with the U.S. decisionmaker is directly linked to the credibility of the implicitly or explicitly attributed Soviet motivations in the situation at hand. It is not important that the analyst's implicit or explicit assessment of Soviet motivations to escalate to a major war from a particular situation be correct. It is critically important, however, that the situation based motivations he (or the decisionmakers) attribute to them are sufficiently plausible to be accepted as a serious possibility and induce the preparatory/precautionary moves dictated by prudence.

One basic set of assumptions about Soviet motivations and concerns recommends itself. These motivations and concerns might drive them in a particular set of circumstances to deliberately escalate to a major war initiation. This set assumes:<sup>1</sup>

1. That they--in their foreign affairs initiatives--persistently attempt to acquire, maintain, and, when necessary, use leverage to limit and direct the initiatives of other nations;

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<sup>1</sup>This set of assumptions about Soviet motivations and concerns as they might lead to war initiating decisions is far from the only such set that might be developed and used. It is proffered as an example and as a reminder that the warning analyst must make such assumptions, explicitly or implicitly, to focus his attention on the really serious escalating possibilities.

2. That they view their military capabilities and potentials as an instrument to acquire and maintain such leverage by including respectful concern (or fear);

3. That they are so well aware of the uncertainties inherent in major war and the difficulties and uncertainties entailed in their control in combat of their forces that only imminent and seriously perceived threats or outstanding perceived opportunities would override these concerns; and

4. That their personal tenure in office is directly related to the pattern of successes or failures of the foreign initiatives they advocate, and that a recent pattern of failures and losses (losses of leverage) arising from actions they advocated would constitute a threat of such seriousness that they might risk the uncertainties involved in war initiation if that were judged necessary to preserve their power positions.

This set of assumptions has considerable explanatory power when applied to history, enough to make projective extrapolations into the future adequately plausible.

The Soviet Union has been involved in numerous foreign conflicts since World War II but almost always in noncombat supportive mode--a mode designed to give them leverage over their clients of the moment whose objectives, if and when attained, would expand the area of USSR leverage. And by adopting the noncombat supportive mode, they have--to a considerable extent--isolated themselves from the uncertainties of combat outcomes and combat force control in the sense that unfavorable outcomes have not subsequently been translated into the advocates' loss of power position in the Kremlin.<sup>1</sup> They have built up their general purpose and strategic nuclear forces to the current point that they evoke a very useful degree of cautious concern in the United States, Europe (East and West), China, and elsewhere. In the Middle East in 1973 when their major Arab clients were in serious trouble they reacted with a threat of combat involvement to prevent the loss of leverage there, and by maintaining their credibility elsewhere.

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<sup>1</sup>Khrushchev, in Cuba in 1962, failed to so isolate himself; this perhaps contributed to his subsequent ouster.

The two times that their inhibitions against committing Soviet forces to combat were overcome were Hungary 1956 and Czechoslovakia 1968, two cases in which the ultimate outcomes were reasonably certain and the periods during which important uncertainties would exist were predictably short. The objective in both cases was to regain lost or seriously diminishing Soviet leverage. A Soviet failure to react to the loss of leverage could well have led to an upheaval and change in Kremlin leadership with the advocates of inaction paying the price of their advocacy.

If the warning analyst accepts this general notion as a useful working hypothesis, then he must be seriously concerned with the escalatory patterns, as they might be viewed by the Soviet leaders, that might lead them to a war initiating decision. A formalized system to track escalatory developments in a way that might signal critical points would seem to be an important warning tool.

Appendix

THE ESCALATORY STEPS IN THE 1973 MIDDLE EAST WAR  
CHARACTERIZED IN VIGNETTE/WORKSHEET FORM

SITUATION/ESCALATION SPACE WORKSHEET

Situation:

PRE YOM KIPPUR 1973

FROM THE US/ISRAELI POINT OF VIEW

Existing situation elements indicated by X.

Threatened situation elements indicated by T, the situation that would exist if the threat were implemented.

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Fig. A.1--Pre Yom Kippur 1973 worksheet, U.S./Israeli point of view

SITUATION/ESCALATION SPACE WORKSHEET

Situation:

PRE YOM KIPPUR 1973

FROM SOVIET/ARAB POINT OF VIEW

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X = actual situation  
T = threatened situation

Fig. A.2--Pre Yom Kippur 1973 worksheet, Soviet/Arab point of view

SITUATION/ESCALATION SPACE WORKSHEET

Situation:

THE ARAB ATTACK ON ISRAELI FORCES IN THE SINAI AND GOLAN HEIGHTS--  
YOM KIPPUR 1973

<p><b>A. Parties involved in conflict</b></p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>US side</td> <td>US / SU</td> <td>SU side</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td></td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>ally</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> <td>mult. <input type="checkbox"/> friend <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> malt.</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>neutral</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>intrastate faction</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>NA</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		US side	US / SU	SU side	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	ally	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	mult. <input type="checkbox"/> friend <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> malt.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	neutral	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	intrastate faction	<input type="checkbox"/>		NA		<p><b>D. Superpower Declaratory Policy</b></p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>US side</td> <td></td> <td>SU side</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>public announcement of action</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>private announcement of action</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>public verbal threat</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>private verbal threat</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>tacit threat</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> <td>no verbal or tacit threat</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		US side		SU side	<input type="checkbox"/>	public announcement of action	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	private announcement of action	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	public verbal threat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	private verbal threat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	tacit threat	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	no verbal or tacit threat	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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<input type="checkbox"/>	anti-equipment (temporary)	<input type="checkbox"/>																																											
<input type="checkbox"/>	not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/>																																											

X = actual situation

Fig. A.3--Arab attack on Israeli forces worksheet

**Situation:**

**YOM KIPPUR WAR**

**THE SYRIAN ADVANCE INTO ISRAEL PROPER**

**A. Parties involved in conflict**

[illegible]

### B. Location of combat

US side		US / SU		SU side	
<input type="checkbox"/>		space		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>		sea		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>		ally		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>		friend		<input type="checkbox"/>	mult.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	mult. <input type="checkbox"/>	neutral		<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>		N/A		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

**C. Degree of superpower military involvement**

<u>US side</u>		<u>SU side</u>
<input type="checkbox"/>	off. combat forces	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	def. combat forces	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	combat advisors	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	arms (gift)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	arms (sale)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	uninvolved	<input type="checkbox"/>

**X = actual situation**

#### D. Superpower Declaratory Policy

[illegible]

### E. Weapons types in combat use

<u>US side</u>		<u>SU side</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	{ nuclear CBR conventional }	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unlimited <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unlimited
<input type="checkbox"/> none		<input type="checkbox"/> none

**F. Combat targeting and oper. constraints policies**

<u>US side</u>		<u>SU side</u>
<input type="checkbox"/>	anti-civilian	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	anti-military (no civ. avoid.)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	anti-military (civilian avoid.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	anti-equipment (permanent)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	anti-equipment (temporary)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Fig. A.4--Syrian advance worksheet**



## SITUATION/ESCALATION SPACE WORKSHEET

**Situation:**

# YOM KIPPUR WAR 1973

# THE BREZHNEV CONDITIONAL THREAT OF SOVIET COMBAT MILITARY INTERVENTION

**A. Parties involved in conflict**

US side	US / SU	SU side
<input type="checkbox"/>	ally	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	friend	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	neutral	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	mult. <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	intrastrate faction	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	MA	<input type="checkbox"/>

### B. Location of combat

[illegible]

### C. Degree of superpower military involvement

	SU side
off. combat forces	<input type="checkbox"/>
def. combat forces	<input type="checkbox"/>
combat advisors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
arms (glit)	<input type="checkbox"/>
arms (sale)	<input type="checkbox"/>
uninvolved	<input type="checkbox"/>

**X = actual situation**  
**T = threatened situation**

#### D. Superpower Declaratory Policy

US side	SU side
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

### E. Weapons types in combat use

<u>US side</u>				<u>SU side</u>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	{ nuclear CBR conventional none	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unlimited <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> conventional <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unlimited	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**F. Combat targeting and oper. constraints policies**

<u>US side</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<u>SU side</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		anti-military (no civ. avoid.)									anti-civilian								
		anti-military (civilian avoid.)									anti-military (no civ. avoid.)								
		anti-equipment (permanent)									anti-equipment (temporary)								
		not applicable									not applicable								

**Fig. A.5---Brezhnev threat worksheet**

SITUATION/ESCALATION SPACE WORKSHEET

Situation:

YOM KIPPUR WAR 1973

THE SITUATION THAT WOULD HAVE EXISTED IF THE USSR HAD COMMITTED ITS COMBAT FORCES AGAINST ISRAEL AND THE U.S. HAD MADE A COUNTER COMMITMENT OF ITS FORCES

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<input type="checkbox"/>	anti-equipment (temporary)																																		
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X = actual situation  
T = threatened situation

Fig. A.6--If the USSR had committed combat forces worksheet